

**Cicero's De Re Publica:
a Copula Between Hellenization and Christianization**

Notes before reading

The paper that follows is what people generally refer to as a *persuasive* paper. The claim it defends is that Cicero's De Re Publica shall be incorporated in the canon of this section of the course. This very claim, however, is not unbiased: this choice reflects my interests growing up in Rome, and for this reason I would like to place attention to the contribution of a Roman in political theory. Specifically, it focuses on the middle part of the *Liber I* of the book¹.

The other reasons behind this choice

The evolution from the Hellenic to the Christian framework could not have taken place without the medium of Romanity. This becomes particularly evident when reading Plato's Crito next to Aquinas' dissertations on state legitimacy. As a matter of fact, the two texts manifest cultural and philosophical incompatibilities. A first difference lies in the different concept of *state*: in the classical Greece, the state was far less extended than in the Middle Ages and it was confined to the πόλις (polis). Secondly, in Plato's text there is no reference to a natural state, while it is the standpoint of Aquinas' claim. Tied to this, despite the divine connotation of both, the concept of law is altered: from the greek unifying νόμος (nomos) to the thriptic of natural, secular and divine law of the Middle Ages. Lastly, although both texts express the idea that the laws are directed towards the common good, only Aquinas gives an organic account of it: laws in Socrates are produced over time by the wise citizens of the πόλις, while, in Aquinas, they are created outside time and space and they are unique and unitary. Given these differences, it appears interesting to investigate when these alterations took place.

¹ Annexed in Appendix 1

A brief introduction and analysis to the text

The Republic (De Re Publica) was written by the Roman eclectic literate and politician Cicero in the I century BC, in the period of crisis of the republic which led to the birth of the Roman empire. The book takes inspiration from Plato's Πολιτεία (Politeia) and, similarly, is written in dialogic form. Cicero chooses as main characters Scipio and Laelius, well educated men who were devoted to their country, with the practical purpose to inspire Romans through giving them exemplars.

In the first chapter, the philosopher addresses the question of state legitimacy and proceeds with providing an account on the ideal form of government. The nucleus of his disputation is contained in the paragraph 25, where he states:

'Est igitur, inquit Africanus, res publica res populi, populus autem non omnis hominum coetus quoquo modo congregatus, sed coetus multitudinis iuris consensu et utilitatis communione sociatus. Eius autem prima causa coeundi est non tam inbecillitas quam naturalis quaedam hominum quasi congregatio; non est enim singulare nec solivagum genus hoc, sed ita generatum ut ne in omnium quidem rerum affluen<tia> idque ipsa natura non invitaret solum sed etiam cogeret.' (Cicero, 1, 25)²

When analyzing this paragraph, it is productive to approach it from the end and work the way up to the first, most complicated, sentence. It is interesting here how Cicero refutes the political connotation of the aristotelian ζῷον πολιτικόν (zoon politikon) in favour of a merely social one. In fact, men, according to Cicero's analysis, are social beings, with a natural tendency (*ipsa natura*) to agglomerate into a population. This aggregation is successful as it is not fortuitous, but willed: it presupposes and works toward a *iuris consensu* (agreement to the laws) and *utilitatis communione* (a common interest). The latter is an important bridging point between the two neighbouring epochs: it merges the mere utility (consequence theory) presented by Socrates, to Aquinas' 'common good' (consent theory). The state, as above described, is the movement from individualism to a *foedus* (a pact), whose unity is granted by a political power. The resulting society, therefore, resembles the one described by Aquinas: it is a pluralistic aggregation in which the individual interests are mediated by a

² "A republic or commonwealth then," said Scipio, "is the wealth or common interest of the people. Every assemblage of men however, gathered together without an object, is not the people, but only an assemblage of the multitude associated by common consent, for reciprocal rights, and reciprocal usefulness. The leading cause of this congregating, is not to be ascribed so much to his weakness, as to the social principle innate with man. Our species is not a solitary and wandering one, but is so created that even when enjoying the greatest affluence" (English translation by Featherstonhaugh, 2017)

subordinating figure, creating a unified interest that still allows also for personal ones. At this point it is useful to problematize the first line: *Est ... res publica res populi* (literally: the public thing is the population's thing). There are a number of issues in the interpretation of this first sentence: first of all, the two names are united by a standard copula (the verb 'to be') which seems to imply identification between the shared community and the political one, but is it really the case? Can it not as well express mere interrelation, or even causation?

Furthermore, the term *res* is extremely general, so one wonders what he really means by it. Is it maybe the public and popular interests? Even though it is impossible to provide stable answers to these questions, this sentence still successfully conveys the nature of the state: an organic, and at the same time pluralistic, congregation of all men with shared interests.

So how specifically is Cicero a useful copula between those two periods?

The differences highlighted in the introduction paragraph are attributable to the shift from *πόλις* to *civitas* (roughly from city to state) and from *νόμος* to *lex* (roughly from norms to laws). The concept of *πόλις*, during classical Greece, pre-existed that of the citizen, as it was the city itself to be at the very basis for the existence of an individual (in fact, the state of nature did not exist). On the other side, from Hellenism onwards (323 BC -), the concept of *civitas* supplanted that of *πόλις*, introducing the idea of the pact between individuals at the birth of the city and therefore inverting the logico-temporal order. Accordingly, the idea of freedom was reshaped: from being the product of the *πόλις*, it becomes the prerequisite to the creation of the *civitas*. Furthermore, the *πόλις* exerted a centripetal force to the citizens, to such an extent that it was defined in terms of the space it occupied and held a strong physical grip to the citizen. In other words, it was closer to the concept of a house than of our current metropoleis. On the opposite side, the Roman *civitas* was a centrifugal force, whose aim, based on the Stoic *λόγος* (logos, a universal rational principle), was to expand and combine its civilization to the entire world. Correspondingly, the greek *νόμος* was deeply rooted in the territory it applied to, while *lex* is a connecting and coercitive entity, composed of the natural law, the universal one (the Stoic *λόγος*), and finally the positive law. All these transitions were still taking place at the time Cicero was writing and became a reality with Christianization.

A last point worth discussing in this paragraph, and arguably the most innovative of Cicero's account, is the dissertation on the forms of government. Plato had delimited the possible forms of government to monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, noted their degenerations (tyranny, oligarchy, ochlocracy) and auspicated for a sort of aristocracy of philosophers in power. His thoughts were expanded by Cicero in the paragraphs following

the 25th. The Roman philosopher explained that the three positive forms ought to decay as each of them is lacking and incomplete, and, based on this, he proposed a mixed government, resembling the one that was in effect in Rome. In fact, the Roman state was comprised of two consoles (monarchy) whose power was mitigated by the senate (aristocracy) and by the tribunes (democracy). Aquinas himself also adopted this division, but eventually opted for monarchy as the ideal form. In this instance, it is possible to see that Cicero had a more elaborated account if compared to the others.

So if it's just a link between two epochs, why is this text so important?

This essay so far has focused on the importance of creating a link between two distant epochs in order to better understand the ideas arising in both. Nevertheless, Cicero's importance ought to be quantified also in terms of his uniqueness. In my opinion, there are two areas in which Cicero's account stands out from those treated in this course and both are linked to his *eclecticity*. In the first place, Cicero was only partly a philosopher and held that philosophy was ineffective when it comes to practical matters, situations in which politics has the superiority. For this reason, he was always able to intermix normative thoughts with some practical applicability.

The second positive manifestation of his eclectic thought is his capability of suggesting both a theory and a form of government that would unite all three existing possibilities. The account on the forms of government has already been discussed in the previous paragraph, so I will discuss here on the nature of his theory. Firstly, his discussion can be considered a consequence theory, as he holds that one of the reasons for the creation of the state is the interest of each individual. In addition, the passage from a state of nature to a political state happens through an agreement (consent theory), and this transition is granted by a human tendency towards the pact (public reason theory).

References

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(Most of what I wrote in the paper comes from my high school knowledge of which I don't know the sources)

Appendix 1

25. Est igitur, inquit Africanus, res publica res populi, populus autem non omnis hominum coetus quoquo modo congregatus, sed coetus multitudinis iuris consensu et utilitatis communione sociatus. eius autem prima causa coeundi est non tam inbecillitas quam naturalis quaedam hominum quasi congregatio; non est enim singulare nec solivagum genus hoc, sed ita generatum ut ne in omnium quidem rerum affluen<tia> idque ipsa natura non invitaret solum sed etiam cogeret.

"A republic or commonwealth then," said Scipio, "is the wealth or common interest of the people. Every assemblage of men however, gathered together without an object, is not the people, but only an assemblage of the multitude associated by common consent, for reciprocal rights, and reciprocal usefulness. The leading cause of this congregating, is not to be ascribed so much to his weakness, as to the social principle innate with man. Our species is not a solitary and wandering one, but is so created that even when enjoying the greatest affluence

26. (Scipio) <quae>dam quasi semina, neque reliquarum virtutum nec ipsius rei publicae reperiatur ulla institutio. hi coetus igitur hac de qua eui causa instituti, sedem primum certo loco domiciliorum causa constituerunt; quam cum locis manuque saepsissent, eius modi coniunctionem tectorum oppidum vel urbem appellaverunt, delubris distinctam spatiisque communibus. omnis ergo populus, qui est talis coetus multitudinis qualem eui, omnis civitas, quae est constitutio populi, omnis res publica, quae ut dixi populi res est, consilio quodam regenda est, ut diuturna sit. id autem consilium primum semper ad eam causam referendum est quae causa genuit civitatem. deinde aut uni tribuendum est, aut delectis quibusdam, aut suscipiendum est multitudini atque omnibus. quare cum penes unum est omnium summa rerum, regem illum unum vocamus, et regnum eius rei publicae statum. cum autem est penes delectos, tum illa civitas optimatum arbitrio regi dicitur. illa autem est civitas

popularis—sic enim appellant -, in qua in populo sunt omnia. atque horum trium generum quodvis, si teneat illud vinculum quod primum homines inter se rei publicae societate devinxit, non perfectum illud quidem neque mea sententia optimum, sed tolerabile tamen, et aliud <ut> alio possit esse praestantius. nam vel rex aequus ac sapiens, vel delecti ac principes cives, vel ipse populus, quamquam id est minime probandum, tamen nullis interiectis iniquitatibus aut cupiditatibus posse videtur aliquo esse non incerto statu.

rather intuitive; for no original institution of the social state has been found, nor of the other moral virtues. These congregations therefore made for the purposes I have explained, established their first seat in some particular place for a residence. Which after being fortified by their labours and by its position, and fitted with temples and public squares, the re-union of dwellings constructed after this manner, they called a town or city. Every people therefore, formed by the assemblage of such a multitude as I have described, every city which is the settlement of a people, every commonwealth which as I have said, is the wealth of the people, must in order to be permanent, be governed by some authority. That authority however must always have a strong relation to the causes from whence the commonwealth derived its origin. It may then be delegated to one, or to some selected persons; or it may be borne by the whole multitude of the people. When therefore authority over all things, is in the control of one man, we call him king; and a commonwealth so ordered, his kingdom. When the authority is exercised by selected persons, then such a state is said to be under the government of the better class. But there is also a popular form of government, for so it is called, where all things are ruled by the people. And of any of these three modes, if the chain is in any manner kept together, which at first united men into the social pact for the sake of the common interest, I would not indeed call the mode perfect, nor say that in my opinion it was the best, but that it was to be tolerated, and that one might be preferable to another. For whether under a just and wise king, or chosen eminent citizens, or the people themselves, although this last is least to be approved of, setting aside the irregularities occasioned by the bad passions of some men, any one may see that a steady government might be preserved.

27. Sed et in regnis nimis expertes sunt ceteri communis iuris et consilii, et in optimatum dominatu vix particeps libertatis potest esse multitudo, cum omni consilio communi ac potestate careat, et cum omnia per populum geruntur quamvis iustum atque moderatum, tamen ipsa aequabilitas est iniqua, cum habet nullos gradus dignitatis. itaque si Cyrus ille Perses iustissimus fuit sapientissimusque rex, tamen mihi populi res—ea enim est ut dixi

antea publica—non maxime expetenda fuisse illa videtur, cum regeretur unius nutu (Text zerstört) ac modo; si Massilienses nostri clientes per delectos et principes cives summa iustitia reguntur, inest tamen in ea condicione populi similitudo quaedam servitutis; si Athenienses quibusdam temporibus sublato Areopago nihil nisi populi scitis ac decretis agebant, quoniam distinctos dignitatis gradus non habebant, non tenebat ornatum suum civitas.

In kingdoms however, the governed are too much deprived of common rights, and of power. Under the better class, the multitude can scarcely be partakers of liberty, as they are not admitted either to the public councils or offices: and when the government is conducted by the people, although it be justly and moderately administered, yet equality itself becomes injustice, seeing that it admits of no degrees of rank. Therefore, although Cyrus the Persian, was a most just and wise king, yet such a commonwealth, (for as I said before, it is the common property,) governed by the nod of one man, does not appear to me very desirable. And although the Massilians our clients are governed with great justice, by their chosen chief men, nevertheless in that condition of a people, there is something resembling slavery. And the Athenians at a certain period having abolished the Areopagus, conducted every thing by ordinances, and decrees of the people; yet as they had no distinctions in dignity, their state was without its ornament.

28. Atque hoc loquor de tribus his generibus rerum publicarum non turbatis atque permixtis, sed suum statum tenentibus. quae genera primum sunt in iis singula vitiis quae ante dixi, deinde habent perniciosa alia vitia; nullum est enim genus illarum rerum publicarum, quod non habeat iter ad finitimum quoddam malum praeceps ac lubricum. nam illi regi, ut eum potissimum nominem, tolerabili aut si voltis etiam amabili Cyro subest ad inmutandi animi licentiam crudelissimus ille Phalaris, cuius in similitudinem dominatus unius proclivi cursu et facile delabitur. illi autem Massiliensium paucorum et principum administrationi civitatis finitimus est qui fuit quodam tempore apud Athenienses triginta <virorum illorum> consensus et factio. iam Atheniensium populi potestatem omnium rerum ipsi, ne alios requiramus, ad furorem multitudinis licentiamque conversam pesti

And this I say of these three kinds of government, not of the agitations and disturbances incidental to them, but of their tranquil and regular state. Those varieties are principally remarkable for the defects I have alluded to. Then they have other pernicious failings, for every one of these governments is travelling a dangerous road, bordering on a slippery and

precipitous path. To a king so commendable, or if you choose, since I especially name him; to the amiable Cyrus; a parallel springs up in the cruel Phalaris, with all his capricious tyranny; into whose similitude the government of one man so easily slides with a downward course. To the administration of the city of the Massilians by their select chiefs, may be opposed the plot and faction of the Thirty, which took place at a certain period among the Athenians. Nor need we look farther; the very Athenian people having assumed the power over all things, and giving license to the fury of the multitude

29.(Scipio) 'taeterrimus, et ex hac vel optimatum vel factiosa tyrannica illa vel regia vel etiam persaepe popularis, itemque ex ea genus aliquod ecflorescere ex illis quae ante dixi solet, mirique sunt orbis et quasi circuitus in rebus publicis commutationum et vicissitudinum; quos cum cognosse sapientis est, tum vero prospicere inpendentis, in gubernanda re publica moderantem cursum atque in sua potestate retinentem, magni cuiusdam civis et divini paene est viri. itaque quartum quoddam genus rei publicae maxime probandum esse sentio, quod est ex his quae prima dixi moderatum et permixtum tribus.'

and this great mischief arises whether under the rule of the better class, or under a tyrannical faction, or under the regal government; and even frequently under the popular form. At the same time from the various forms of government of which I have spoken, something excellent is wont to emanate. For the changes and vicissitudes in public affairs, appear to move in a circle of revolutions; which when recognized by a wise man, as soon as he beholds them impending, if he can moderate their course in the administration of affairs, and restrain them under his control; he acts truly the part of a great citizen, and almost of a divine man. Therefore I think a fourth kind of government, moderated and mixed from those three of which I first spoke, is most to be approved."

30. Hic Laelius: 'scio tibi ita placere Africane: saepe enim ex te audiui; sed tamen, nisi molestum est, ex tribus istis modis rerum publicarum velim scire quod optimum iudices. nam vel profuerit aliquid ad cog

"I know" said Laelius, "that such is your opinion Africanus, for I have often heard you say so. Nevertheless, unless it is troublesome to you, I should be glad to learn which you judge best of these three kinds of government. For either it will throw some light upon

31. (Scipio) 'et talis est quaeque res publica, qualis eius aut natura aut voluntas qui illam regit. itaque nulla alia in civitate, nisi in qua populi potestas summa est, ullum domicilium libertas habet; qua quidem certe nihil potest esse dulcius, et quae si aequa non est ne libertas quidem est. qui autem aequa potest esse—omitto dicere in regno, ubi ne obscura quidem est aut dubia servitus, sed in istis civitatibus in quibus verbo sunt liberi omnes? ferunt enim suffragia, mandant inperia magistratus, ambiuntur, rogantur, sed ea dant [magis] quae etiamsi nolint danda sint, et quae ipsi non habent unde ali petunt; sunt enim expertes imperii, consilii publici, iudicii delectorum iudicum, quae familiarum vetustatibus aut pecuniis ponderantur. in libero autem populo, ut Rhodi, ut Athenis, nemo est civium qui

every government partakes of the nature and will of him who administers it. So that in no other state, save where the power of the people predominates, has liberty any home. Liberty the sweetest of all blessings, and which if it is not equal for all, is not liberty. For what equality can there be, I do not mean in kingdoms where slavery has no doubtful character: but in those states where all are nominally free: there indeed they give their votes, confer commands, magistracies and are solicited and intreated. But in truth they only part with that, however repugnant it may be to them, which must be conferred: things which they cannot retain, which is the reason why others seek to possess them. For they are invested with no command, have no public authority, nor are called to be judges in the tribunals: privileges which belong either to ancient families, or are purchased by money. Among a free people however, as at Rhodes or Athens, there is no citizen who

32. (Scipio) <po>pulo aliquis unus pluresve divitiores opulentioresque extitissent, tum ex eorum fastidio et superbia nata esse commemorant, cedentibus ignavis et inbecillis et adrogantiae divitum succumbentibus. si vero ius suum populi teneant, negant quicquam esse praestantius, liberius, beatius, quippe qui domini sint legum, iudiciorum, belli, pacis, foederum, capitis unius cuiusque, pecuniae. hanc unam rite rem publicam, id est rem populi, appellari putant. itaque et a regum et a patrum dominatione solere in libertatem rem populi vindicari, non ex liberis populis reges requiri aut potestatem atque opes optimatum. et vero negant oportere indomiti populi vitio genus hoc totum liberi populi repudiari: concordii populo et omnia referente ad incolumitatem et ad libertatem suam nihil esse inmutabilius, nihil firmius; facillimam autem in ea re publica esse posse concordiam, in qua idem conducat omnibus; ex utilitatis varietatibus, cum aliis aliud expediat, nasci discordias; itaque cum patres rerum potirentur, numquam constitisse civitatis statum; multo iam id in regnis minus, quorum, ut ait Ennius, 'nulla [regni] sancta societas nec fides est.' quare cum lex sit civilis

societatis vinculum, ius autem legis aequale, quo iure societas civium teneri potest, cum par non sit condicio civium? si enim pecunias aequari non placet, si ingenia omnium paria esse non possunt, iura certe paria debent esse eorum inter se qui sunt cives in eadem re publica. quid est enim civitas nisi iuris societas civium?

Some assert, that when one or more in a state becomes conspicuous by his opulence or riches, disdain and pride soon break out: and the weak and indolent yield and bend under the arrogance of riches. But if the people are able to preserve their rights, they think no condition of things could be more excellent, more free, or more happy. For in their hands would be the laws, the tribunals, war, peace, treaties, and the properties and lives of all the citizens. This sort of government they think is properly called one republic, that is the common interest of the people. Wherefore it is, that the people are wont to restore commonwealths to liberty from the domination of kings, and patricians; not that kings are believed to be necessary to a free people, or that the better class are the source of power and wealth. And they deny that these advantages should not be conceded to a free people on account of the excesses of uncivilized nations: for where the people are unanimous, and every thing tends to the public safety and liberty, nothing can be more unchangeable, nothing more firm. Unanimity in such a commonwealth is very easy, where the common effort is for the public good. But from opposing interests, where one man clashes with another, discord arises. Wherefore when the senate had possession of the government, the condition of the state was never sound. In kingdoms the disadvantages are still greater; of them Ennius said

“No holy confidence or fellowship reigns there.”

Wherefore as the law is the bond of civil society, and equal rights form that of the law, by what power can a community of citizens be maintained, where their condition is not an equal one? If therefore it is not expedient to equalize fortunes; if the powers of mind cannot be equalized in all, certainly then an equality of rights ought to exist, among those who are citizens of the same republic. For what is a state but a community of rights?

33.(Scipio) ceteras vero res publicas ne appellandas quidem putant iis nominibus quibus illae sese appellari velint. cur enim regem appellem Iovis optimi nomine hominem dominandi cupidum aut imperii singularis, populo oppresso dominantem, non tyrannum potius? tam enim esse clemens tyrannus quam rex inportunus potest: ut hoc populorum intersit utrum comi domino an aspero serviant; quin serviant quidem fieri non potest. quo autem modo adsequi poterat Lacedaemo illa tum, cum praestare putabatur disciplina rei publicae, ut

bonis uteretur iustisque regibus, cum esset habendus rex quicumque genere regio natus esset? nam optimatis quidem quis ferat, qui non populi concessu sed suis comitiis hoc sibi nomen adrogaverunt? qui enim iudicatur iste optimus? doctrina artibus studiis, audio: quando?

other governments however are deemed by them not to deserve those names, which they have chosen to arrogate to themselves. For why should I call a man who is greedy of rule, or of the sole command, and who is trampling upon an oppressed people, king, which is the title of the good Jupiter, rather than tyrant? A tyrant may be clement as well as a king may be oppressive; the matter really interesting to the people is, whether they are to serve under a gentle or a severe master: for as to being any thing but servants, that is not to be avoided. How could Lacedemon, when she was thought to excel in the science of government, possess only good and just kings, when she was obliged to take any king who was sprung from the royal blood? And the better class, who can endure them, who have arrogated to themselves in their own assemblies, a name not conceded to them by the people? For who is the man to be pronounced best, in learning, in the arts, in studies?

34.(Scipio) Si fortuito id faciet, tam cito evertetur quam navis, si e vectoribus sorte ductus ad gubernacula accesserit. quodsi liber populus deliget quibus se committat, deligetque si modo salvus esse vult optimum quemque, certe in optimorum consiliis posita est civitatum salus, praesertim cum hoc natura tulerit, non solum ut summi virtute et animo praeesse inbecillioribus, sed ut hi etiam parere summis velint. verum hunc optimum statum pravis hominum opinionibus eversum esse dicunt, qui ignorance virtutis, quae cum in paucis est tum a paucis iudicatur et cernitur, opulentos homines et copiosos, tum genere nobili natos esse optimos putant. hoc errore vulgi cum rem publicam opes paucorum, non virtutes tenere coeperunt, nomen illi principes optimatum mordicus tenent, re autem carent eo nomine. nam divitiae, nomen, opes vacuae consilio et vivendi atque aliis imperandi modo dedecoris plenae sunt et insolentis superbiae, nec ulla deformior species est civitatis quam illa in qua opulentissimi optimi putantur. virtute vero gubernante rem publicam, quid potest esse praeclarius? cum is qui inperat aliis servit ipse nulli cupiditati, cum quas ad res civis instituit et vocat, eas omnis complexus est ipse, nec leges inponit populo quibus ipse non pareat, sed suam vitam ut legem praefert suis civibus. qui si unus satis omnia consequi posset, nihil opus esset pluribus; si universi videre optimum et in eo consentire possent, nemo delectos principes quaereret. difficultas ineundi consilii rem a rege ad plures, error et temeritas

populorum a multitudine ad paucos transtulit. sic inter <in>firmitatem unius temeritatemque multorum medium optimates possederunt locum, quo nihil potest esse moderatius; quibus rem publicam tuentibus beatissimos esse populos necesse est, vacuos omni cura et cogitatione, aliis permissio otio suo, quibus id tuendum est neque committendum ut sua commoda populus negligi a principibus putet. nam aequabilitas quidem iuris, quam amplexantur liberi populi, neque servari potest—ipsi enim populi, quamvis soluti ecfrenatique sint, praecipue multis multa tribuunt, et est in ipsis magnus dilectus hominum et dignitatum -, eaque quae appellatur aequabilitas iniquissima est: cum enim par habetur honos summis et infimis, qui sint in omni populo necesse est, ipsa aequitas iniquissima est; quod in iis civitatibus quae ab optimis reguntur accidere non potest. haec fere Laeli et quaedam eiusdem generis ab iis qui eam formam rei publicae maxime laudant disputari solent.'

If it was done by lot, the government would be overthrown; like a ship, at whose helm, some passenger taken at hazard was placed. A nation can entrust its affairs to whom it may choose; and if it wishes to remain free, it will choose from among the best. For certainly the security of states is found in the counsels of the best citizens; especially as nature has not only ordained that they should preserve an influence over the weak by their conspicuous virtue and courage, but also that the weak should resign themselves to the government of great minds. This most desirable state of things, they say, is prevented by the erroneous opinions of men who, through ignorance of that virtue, which belongs to but few, and is seen and appreciated only by few, deem those who are sprung from a noble race, or who are opulent and wealthy, to be the best men. Under this vulgar error, when the power, not the virtues of a few, have got possession of the government; those chiefs tenaciously preserve the title of better class; a name however to which the substance is wanting. For riches, titles, and power, devoid of wisdom, of the knowledge of self-government, and that of the government of others, exhibit nothing but insolent and disgraceful pride. Nor can the condition of any city be more deplorable, than where the richest men pass for the best. But what can be more delightful than a state virtuously governed? What more illustrious than the man, who while he governs others, is himself the slave of no bad passions? Who, while he calls upon the citizens to observe the regulations he has formed, lives up to them all himself? Nor imposes any laws ⁷²upon the people, which he himself obeys not, but who presents his whole life to his fellow citizens as one unbroken law. If one man could suffice to all things, there would be no need of many; and if all men could perceive what is best, and consent to it, no one would require any chiefs to be elected. The difficulty of coming to wise determinations, has transferred the rule from one king to many persons; and the error and

rashness of the people, from the multitude to a few. Thus between the obstinacy of one, and the temerity of many, the better class have possessed themselves of the middle and least turbulent of all the situations: by whom if the commonwealth is well administered, the people relieved from all care and thought, must necessarily be happy: enjoying their independence through the labours of those, whose duty it is to preserve it to them; and who ought never to permit the people to think that their interests are neglected by their rulers. As to that exact equality of rights, which is held so dear by a free people; it cannot be preserved: for the people themselves, however free and unrestrained they may be, are remarkable for their deference to many persons; and exercise a great preference as it respects men and dignities. That which is called equality also, is a most unjust thing in itself: for when the same honour is enjoyed by the high and by the low, through a whole people, that very equality must be unjust; and in those states which are governed by the better class, it can never happen. These, Lælius, and some other reasons resembling them, are wont to be urged by those who chiefly praise that form of government.

73XXXV. "But which, Scipio, among those three, do you chiefly approve of?" said Lælius.

35. Tum Laelius: 'quid tu' inquit 'Scipio? e tribus istis quod maxime probas?' (Scipio) recte quaeris quod maxime e tribus, quoniam eorum nullum ipsum per se separatim probo, anteponoque singulis illud quod conflatum fuerit ex omnibus. sed si unum ac simplex p<ro>bandum <sit>, regium <pro>bem... pri ... in... f ... hoc loco appellatur, occurrit nomen quasi patrium regis, ut ex se natis ita consulentis suis civibus et eos con<s>ervantis stu<dio>sius quam ... entis ... tem ... us ... tibus ... uos sustentari unius optimi et summi viri diligentia. (55) adsunt optimates, qui se melius hoc idem facere profiteantur, plusque fore dicant in pluribus consilii quam in uno, et eandem tamen aequitatem et fidem. ecce autem maxima voce clamat populus neque se uni neque paucis velle parere; libertate ne feris quidem quicquam esse dulcius; hac omnes carere, sive regi sive optimatibus serviant. ita caritate nos capiunt reges, consilio optimates, libertate populi, ut in comparando difficile ad eligendum sit quid maxime velis.' (Laelius) 'credo' inquit, 'sed expediri quae restant vix poterunt, si hoc incohatum reliqueris.'

Scipio. "You do well to ask, which chiefly of the three, since separately I do not approve of any of them; but should prefer to every one of them, a government constituted out of all three. But if one of them for its simplicity may be admired, I should approve of the kingly form, and give it the highest praise. For the name of king calls up at once the idea of a father, consulting with his citizens as if they were his own children; and more anxious to

preserve them, than to reduce them to slavery: it being a great advantage to the weak to be sustained by the exertions and by the foresight of one pre-eminent and good man. Here however the better class profess to do the same thing to more advantage, and say there is more wisdom with numbers than with one, and at the same time equal justice and faith. But the people call out with a loud voice, that they choose neither to obey one nor many; that nothing is sweeter to the beasts of the field than liberty, which is wanting to all who serve either under the better class or under a king. Thus on the score of personal attachment, kings attract us. The better class by their wisdom; and liberty on the side of the people. So that in making the comparison, it is difficult to say which is preferable.”